

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
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AMCONSUL HONG KONG
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 07739

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR VN LA CB FR CH
SUBJ: FRENCH VIEWS ON INDOCHINA

SUMMARY: IN A MARCH 15 TOUR D'HORIZON, A QUAI SOURCE
SPOKE OF CONTINUING FRENCH FRUSTRATIONS IN RELATIONS WITH
THE VIETNAMESE AND THE HOPE THAT THERE WOULD BE SOME
AGREEMENTS FINALLY REACHED TO BE SIGNED OR PUBLICIZED
WHEN SRV PRIME MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG VISITS FRANCE IN
LATE APRIL. THE 1976 PROTOCOL ON FRENCH AID HAS STILL
NOT BEEN AGREED ON. THE FRENCH HAVE NOTED THAT THE SRV
IS DRAWING ON VIETNAMESE IN FRANCE TO ASSIST IN RAISING
VIETNAM'S TECHNOLOGICAL LEVEL. THE FRENCH HAD ASSURED
THE VIETNAMESE THAT PRESIDENT CARTER'S COMMISSION'S VISIT
TO HANOI WAS SERIOUS AND INSPIRED BY GOOD WILL; THE QUAI
THINKS US AID WILL BE NECESSARY FOR SUCCESS. SINO/
VIETNAMESE RELATIONS SEEM BETTER NOW THAN SIX
MONTHS AGO. FRANCO/LAO RELATIONS REMAIN STRAINED. THE
FRENCH ARE PUZZLED BY LAO POSITIONS WHICH ARE NOT IN
LINE WITH THOSE OF HANOI. CAMBODIAN CANTANKEROUSNESS
PRECLUDES AN IMPROVEMENT IN FRANCO/KHMER RELATIONS AND
APPEARS TO HAVE CAUSED EVEN A DETERIORATION IN SINO/
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KHMER RELATIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. VIETNAM.

A. FRENCH RELATIONS WITH VIETNAMESE AND PHAM VAN
DONG VISIT. IN PERIODIC TOUR D'HORIZON, MARCH 15, QUAI
SOURCE SAID THAT THE FRENCH AND VIETNAMESE WERE CON-

DUCTING CONTINUOUS NEGOTIATIONS IN PARIS AND HANOI IN PREPARATION FOR THE VISIT TO FRANCE IN LATE APRIL (EXACT DATE WILL SOON BE ANNOUNCED) OF SRV PRIME MINISTER PHAM VAN DONG. THEY EXPECT THAT CERTAIN AGREEMENTS WILL BE REACHED TO PERMIT SOME DOCUMENTS TO BE SIGNED DURING DONG'S VISIT. HOWEVER THEY ARE NOT QUITE SURE WHAT MAY BE READY AT THAT TIME BECAUSE OF THE VIETNAMESE PROPENSITY FOR CONTINUALLY CHANGING SIGNALS. THEY HAVE COME TO THE CONCLUSION THAT THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A VIETNAMESE FINAL AGREEMENT; AT THE LAST MINUTE, THE VIETNAMESE DECIDE TO DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY OR GO BACK ON AN AGREEMENT ALREADY REACHED. THE SOURCE, WHEN HE ASSUMED HIS FUNCTION, HAD BEEN IMPRESSED BY THE BASIC FORTHRIGHTNESS OF THE VIETNAMESE, AND IT WAS ONLY GRADUALLY HE HAD DECIDED HE REALLY DID NOT UNDERSTAND THEM AND COULD NOT FIGURE OUT HOW TO KEEP THINGS MOVING SMOOTHLY. HE HAD AT LEAST CONCLUDED THAT IT WAS NOT HIS OWN FAULT, AND IT WAS CERTAINLY NOT FROM A LACK OF FRENCH EFFORTS. THE FRENCH HAD CONCLUDED THAT THE PRINCIPAL REASONS WERE THE INEFFICIENCY AND OVERLAPPING BUREAUCRACY IN HANOI AND THE LACK OF A BASIC, INTELLIGENT ECONOMIC PLAN. THEY HAD CONCLUDED THAT THE VIETNAMESE WOULD AT LEAST WISH SOME AGREEMENTS TO PROVIDE SUBSTANCE FOR THE DONG VISIT, BUT ONE COULD NOT PREDICT WHICH ONES THEY WOULD BE, EVEN AT THIS STAGE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS.

THE SOURCE ADMITTED WITH SOME DISCOURAGEMENT THAT THE 1976 PROTOCOL ON AID WAS STILL IN THE PROCESS
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OF BEING NEGOTIATED. THEY HAD NO IDEA WHEN THEY MIGHT BEGIN TO NEGOTIATE A 1977 PROTOCOL. FUNDS UNDER THE PREVIOUS PROTOCOLS, PARTICULARLY THAT OF 1975, WERE STILL NOT DRAWN UPON. THE SOURCE THOUGHT IT POSSIBLE THAT THE 1976 PROTOCOL MIGHT BE READY AT THE TIME OF THE DONG VISIT. THE SOURCE COMMENTED THAT DESPITE THE FRENCH GOOD WILL IN TRYING TO GIVE AID AND THE AVIDITY WITH

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WHICH THE VIETNAMESE SOUGHT GENERAL ASSURANCES ON AID, THE NEGOTIATING OF A SPECIFIC AID AGREEMENT WAS CONSIDERABLY MORE DIFFICULT. AS FOR THE ACTUAL DELIVERY AND IMPLEMENTATION OF AID, THERE ARE EVEN MORE COMPLICATIONS.

B. PERSONAL "ASSISTANCE" PROGRAMS. THE SOURCE NOTED THAT THE VIETNAMESE GOVERNMENT APPEARED TO HAVE A GOOD CENSUS OF TECHNICALLY TRAINED VIETNAMESE, OR FORMER VIETNAMESE, IN FRANCE WHO MIGHT BE CALLED UPON TO ASSIST "THE HOMELAND" IN DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS. MANY OF THESE VIETNAMESE NOW HAVE FRENCH NATIONALITY AND ARE WELL ESTABLISHED IN FRENCH INDUSTRIES OR ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS. THEY ARE INVITED BACK TO GIVE SHORT COURSES TO RAISE THE TECHNICAL LEVEL OF THEIR COMPATRIOTS. THEY ALSO SERVE AS AN INFORMAL CHANNEL FOR PROCURING PUBLICATIONS AND FOR THE DIFFUSION OF INFORMATION ON NEW PROCESSES BEING USED IN FRANCE. THE FRENCH HAVE NOTED NO INDICATIONS THAT THE SRV GOVERNMENT WISHES TO HAVE THESE TECHNICIANS RETURN TO CONFIDENTIAL

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SETTLE PERMANENTLY IN VIETNAM; THE IMPLICATION IS CLEAR THAT HANOI FINDS THEM MORE USEFUL IF THEY CONTINUE TO RESIDE IN FRANCE AND MAKE PERIODIC VISITS TO VIETNAM.

C. PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION VISIT TO HANOI. THE SOURCE SAID THAT THE FOREIGN MINISTRY AT A HIGH LEVEL HAD INFORMED THE VIETNAMESE AMBASSADOR THAT THE GOF CONSIDERED THAT THE PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION REPRESENTS A SINCERE US EFFORT MOTIVATED BY GOOD WILL. THEY THOUGHT

THEIR VIEW HAD SOMEWHAT IMPRESSED THE VIETNAMESE, BUT WHO COULD KNOW WHETHER IT HAD REALLY CONVINCED THEM. THE GENERAL CONCLUSION WAS THAT THE US MISSION WOULD BE A SUCCESS IF THERE WAS EVEN JUST A HINT THAT THERE WOULD BE A SUBSTANTIAL US AID PROGRAM. (THE FRENCH HAD LEARNED THAT THE MISSION WOULD ANNOUNCE THE SYMBOLIC GIFT OF A QUANTITY OF GRAIN.) VICE FOREIGN MINISTER NGUYEN CO THACH HAD INSISTED WITH THE FRENCH THAT VIETNAM WAS MORE INTERESTED IN THE ACTUAL AID THAN IN ANY QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE, SUCH AS THE VALIDITY OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT AND ITS ARTICLE 21. THE FRENCH HAD THEREFORE CONCLUDED THAT DESPITE THE CURRENT DIFFICULTIES IN ABSORBING AID, THE VIETNAMESE WERE VERY INTERESTED IN WHAT THEY WOULD HOPE WOULD BE A MASSIVE AID PROGRAM LATER WHEN THEY WERE BETTER SET UP TO WORK OUT WHAT AID WE WOULD OFFER AND THEY COULD ACCEPT. FRENCH EMBASSY HANOI HAD COMMENTED ON THE "MODERATION" OF THE "NHAN DAN" EDITORIAL ON PRESIDENT CARTER'S PRESS CONFERENCE.

D. SINO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS. ALTHOUGH THE FRENCH HAD REALIZED THAT CHINESE ARMS SHIPMENTS WERE GREATLY REDUCED IN 1973, FOLLOWING THE SIGNING OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT, THEIR EMBASSY IN HANOI HAD RECENTLY REPORTED THAT NOW ALL SHIPMENTS OF ARMS, APPARENTLY INCLUDING EVEN SPARE PARTS, WERE STOPPED. NONETHELESS, THE FRENCH HAD SEEN A NUMBER OF INDICATIONS THAT SINO/VIETNAMESE RELATIONS WERE NOW CONSIDERABLY IMPROVED COMPARED TO

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WHAT THEY WERE SIX MONTHS AGO. THERE SEEMED TO BE EVEN GREATER DIALOGUE, AND MANY OFFICIALS ON THEIR WAY FROM EUROPE NOW STOPPED OFF FOR SEVERAL DAYS IN PEKING WHERE THEY OFTEN BROKE FOR REST AND CONSULTATIONS, AT LEAST WITH THEIR VIETNAMESE COLLEAGUES, RATHER THAN GOING DIRECTLY TO MOSCOW.

2. LAOS.

A. FRANCO/LAO RELATIONS. THE FRENCH STILL HAVE CONSIDERABLE PROBLEMS WITH THE LAO. TWO FRENCHMEN HAVE BEEN IMPRISONED RECENTLY AND THE DISPUTE OVER THE DEBT OF THE PREVIOUS LAO GOVERNMENT REMAINS ACERBIC. THE SOURCE COMMENTED THAT THE VIETNAMESE WERE VERY EASY TO DEAL WITH COMPARED TO THE LAO. THE SOLUTION TO THE GVN DEBT, WHILE DIFFICULT, HAD ONLY TAKEN A MATTER OF A YEAR TO ARRIVE AT; NO ONE COULD PREDICT HOW LONG IT MIGHT TAKE TO ACHIEVE SOMETHING WITH THE LAO. SINCE THE FRENCH SIDE WAS PRIMARILY THE MINISTRY OF FINANCE, WHICH IS RELUCTANT TO DEPART FROM ESTABLISHED PROCEDURES ON DEBTS, THE GOF WAS NOT SHOWING THE FLEXIBILITY WHICH

WOULD PROBABLY BE NECESSARY TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM. THE LAO, LIKE THE VIETNAMESE, APPEARED DETERMINED TO EMPHASIZE THAT THEY INHERITED THE ASSETS BUT NONE OF THE LIABILITIES OF PREDECESSOR GOVERNMENTS. THE FRENCH HAD WORKED OUT A SOLUTION WHICH PERMITS THE FRENCH-OWNED TIN MINE TO OPERATE, BUT THERE WAS NO INDICATION

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WHETHER THERE WOULD BE ANY SOLUTION CONCERNING THE OTHER TIN MINE.

B. INTERNAL LAO SPLIT. THE VIETNAMESE ROLE IN LAOS IS OBVIOUSLY VERY POWERFUL, AND THE FRENCH CAN NOT QUITE UNDERSTAND WHY THE LAO OFFICIALS ADOPT ON SO MANY OCCASIONS ATTITUDES CONTRARY TO THOSE HELD BY HANOI. THEY HAD CONCLUDED THAT ONE ELEMENT MIGHT BE EFFORTS BY SOME WITHIN THE LAO HIERARCHY TO PLAY OFF THE SOVIETS AGAINST THE VIETNAMESE. KAYSONE, FOR EXAMPLE, WAS CONSIDERED BY SOME TO BE TOO CLOSE TO THE SOVIETS IN THE EYES OF HANOI. IN A VERY RECENT CABLE, AMBASSADOR DUZER HAD NOTED THAT THERE WERE STILL RUMORS OF A SPLIT BETWEEN KAYSONE AND SOUPHANOUVONG, BUT HE DID NOT THINK THAT THE SPLIT WAS VERY REAL OR THAT IMPORTANT.

3. CAMBODIA

SOMETIME EARLIER, THE FRENCH HAD ANTICIPATED THAT
THE CAMBODIANS WOULD BREAK DOWN AND TRY TO GET IN TOUCH
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WITH THEM, BUT NOW, NOT ONLY THE LENGTH OF THE DELAY,
BUT ALSO THE ANTI-FRENCH FLAVOR OF MANY STATEMENTS HAD
CONVINCED THEM THAT FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE IN ANY
CASE THE CAMBODIANS WOULD REMAIN VERY COOL TOWARD FRANCE
EVEN IF NOT SO HOSTILE AS TOWARD THE AMERICANS. THE
FRENCH HAD NOTED THAT THE CAMBODIAN CANTANKEROUSNESS
HAD EVEN BEGUN TO ALIENATE THE CHINESE WHO WERE
INDICATING FAR LESS WARMTH TOWARD THEIR CAMBODIAN
COMRADES THAN IN THE PAST. THE FRENCH HAD NO CONTACT
WITH CAMBODIAN OFFICIALS ABROAD AND NONE WITH THE
INFORMAL CONTACT OFFICER FOR THE CAMBODIAN COMMUNITY
WHOM PHNOM PENH HAD LEFT BEHIND WHEN THE FRENCH WITHDREW
STATUS AND PRIVILEGES FROM THE CAMBODIAN REPRESENTATIVES
IN PARIS.
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